

Stages of change model

The stages of change model can be a useful tool for motivating people to make positive changes in their lives. Sometimes, people cannot make changes on their own. For example, they may:

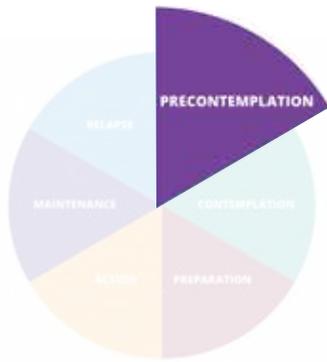
- not see the negative effects the substance use causes, so they do not see a need to change
- know a change is needed, but do not know how to make the change
- be afraid to try to make the change because they may be uncertain of what will follow.

The stages of change model can help you see:

- where your relative is in the change process
- how ready they are to take action
- how to deal with the emotions involved in suggesting a change
- how to support your relative based on which stage they are in.

The stages of change model identifies six stages that a person will experience when making any change: **precontemplation** (not ready), **contemplation** (getting ready), **preparation** (ready), **action**, **maintenance** and **relapse**.





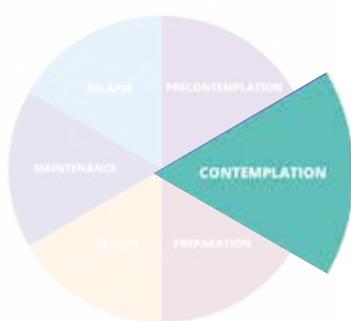
STAGE 1: PRECONTEMPLATION

"I don't think I have a problem."

At this stage, people may not believe there is a problem. They have not yet thought about making a change, or do not want to change. Precontemplation is often the longest stage. It takes patience and persistence to help someone move from precontemplation to the next stage, contemplation.

Ways to help your relative at the precontemplation stage:

- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Provide information about the consequences of substance use in a non-threatening way.



STAGE 2: CONTEMPLATION

"I know I have to stop what I'm doing, but I enjoy it."

At this stage, people may begin to see that their use has some consequences. They know that change is needed, but are unsure or not ready to make this change. This stage may last a long time.

Ways to help your relative at the contemplation stage:

- Make sure your relative knows that only they can decide to change.
- Help your relative go over the pros and cons of continuing the behaviour and of changing it.
- Encourage the person to talk about making the change.
- Express confidence that they can do it.



STAGE 3: PREPARATION

"I know I have the strength to change, I just don't know how to do it."

In this stage, people are preparing for change. They begin to set clear goals to change their problematic substance use, such as meeting with a counsellor or joining a gym. They may be more willing to talk about the pros and cons of substance use.

Ways to help your relative at the preparation stage:

- Ask for permission to suggest options.
- Reinforce the reasons for change.
- Encourage small initial steps.
- Identify barriers and work together to find ways to move beyond them.



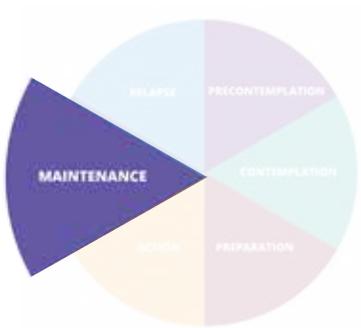
STAGE 4: ACTION

"I'm working on it."

People are now making changes by adjusting their behaviour, experiences or environment to deal with their problems. In this stage, your relative may have reduced or completely stopped using substances and is working on the problem. The action stage is usually the shortest, but it is also when people depend on their willpower and are at the greatest risk for relapse (returning to an earlier stage). People are usually open to offers of help and support at this time.

Ways to help your relative at the action stage:

- Provide practical advice on how to make the change.
- Remind the person of the long-term benefits of the change.
- Follow up on a regular basis.
- When the person struggles with the change, talk about their strengths and previous successes.
- Support your relative as they replace substance use with new activities.



STAGE 5: MAINTENANCE

"It's a one-day-at-a-time struggle."

At this stage, people establish new behaviour patterns and sustain the change over the long term. They have stopped using substances for at least six months and are working to hold on to this success. The threat of relapse lessens as people grow more aware of the factors that can cause relapse. They take steps to deal with those factors.

Ways to help your relative at the maintenance stage:

- Help identify what has worked well for them.
- Remind them of the benefits of continued change.
- List the positive changes the person has already made.
- Help come up with plans to deal with situations that may cause a relapse.



STAGE 6: RELAPSE

"I messed up. Now I'm back to square one!"

At this stage, people go back to the old substance use behaviour they were trying to change, or return to an earlier stage. Relapse is common throughout the stages of change. In fact, people may relapse more than once before they make a stable change. Relapse should not be seen as a failure, but rather as an opportunity for learning. If you can identify factors that led to the relapse, you can help your relative create a more effective plan to prevent another relapse from happening. This learning is a useful part of lasting change.

Ways to help your relative with a relapse:

- Let them know that relapse is a normal part of the journey to permanent change.
- Show understanding but remain confident in success.
- Together, examine what triggered the relapse and make new plans for dealing with it in the future.